The graduate program leading to the Master of Science in Pharmacology and Toxicology prepares individuals for a variety of career objectives in biomedical science. These careers include but are not limited to industrial scientists and scientists in government regulatory agencies. The M.S. program will be of interest to individuals planning on pursuing technical positions in pharmacology or toxicology research or testing; students interested in the health professions, such as medicine or dentistry, who desire additional research training; and those interested in government positions, such as those in regulatory agencies, that require training in pharmacology and toxicology.

The program incorporates formal instructional activity and research training mentored by members of the graduate faculty. The master's program is distinguished from the Ph.D. degree offered by the department in that the M.S. student is not being prepared for a career as an independent investigator.

Student learning outcomes

1. Communication skills: Degree candidates will demonstrate the achievement of an appropriate level of oral communication skills with respect to the content, organization, logical flow, presentation and appropriate use of language incorporating the use of visual aids, as measured by rubric. The candidate will demonstrate the achievement of an appropriate level of written communication skill with respect to grammar, syntax, spelling and use of vocabulary to effectively present information including the use of figures, tables and citations as measured by rubric.

2. Integrated knowledge of bioscience: Degree candidates will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of the current elements of the biosciences as related to disciplinary specialization and a more detailed understanding of the individual area of scholarship, including an appropriate familiarity with the research literature and the ability to evaluate and critique publications as measured by rubric.

3. Problem-solving skills: Degree candidates will demonstrate an appropriate level of skill in the identification and selection of meaningful problems to be addressed in bioscience research, including the ability to defend said identifications and to design and develop appropriate methods to solve said problems as measured by rubric.

4. Experimental design: Degree candidates will demonstrate the achievement of an appropriate level of competence in the ability to appraise, modify and/or create, and implement experimental protocols and to design and develop experiments as measured by rubric.

VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs

The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the Graduate School website (http://www.graude.vcu.edu) and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regcs)

Degree candidacy requirements

A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for continuing master’s or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student’s graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student’s faculty regarding the student's academic achievements and the student’s readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regcs/grad/candidacy)

Graduation requirements

As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regcs/grad/graduation-info)

Other information

School of Medicine graduate program policies

The School of Medicine provides policies applicable to all programs administratively housed in the school. Information on master’s programs is available elsewhere in this chapter of the Graduate Bulletin.
Apply online at graduate.admissions.vcu.edu (http://www.graduate.admissions.vcu.edu).

**Admission requirements**

- **Degree:** M.S.
- **Semester(s) of entry:** Fall
- **Deadline dates:** Apr 15
- **Test requirements:** GRE (MCAT acceptable in lieu of GRE)

**Special requirements**

- See the departmental website for additional information on the application process.

In addition to the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/study/admission-graduate-study/admission-requirements), qualified applicants to the M.S. degree program typically must have:

1. Baccalaureate degrees with a major in fields such as biology, chemistry, biochemistry, pharmacy and related sciences
2. GRE scores of 1100 (verbal plus quantitative) and 3.5 (analytical) or equivalent scores on the new GRE exam
3. Undergraduate GPA of 3.2
4. Some laboratory research experience

**Basic science, research-intensive, non-thesis curriculum for medical students**

Individuals who are participants in medical training (the Doctor of Medicine program) at VCU may be eligible for enrollment in a research-intensive, non-thesis graduate curriculum. This basic science option builds on the core of disciplinary material embedded in the first two years of training in the medical school curriculum. Additional exposure is provided to specialized areas in basic science disciplines in concert with an intensive research experience leading to the preparation of a report in the form of a manuscript suitable for publication. The program is designed to be completed within 12 to 15 months. Subject matter related to the core material and/or suitable elective courses taken in the didactic phase of medical training correspond to a minimum of the equivalent of 24 graduate credit hours. The equivalent of 12 credit hours may be applied to the M.S. degree program in which the student is enrolled in accordance with Graduate School policy. Medical students interested in the basic science option should contact the M.S. graduate program director for additional information.

**Degree requirements**

In addition to the general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info), students in the master's program must complete a minimum of 30 graduate credit hours.

The Master of Science in Pharmacology and Toxicology is a research-oriented degree program comprising graduate course work and supervised research leading to a master's thesis. Students must conduct a substantial original investigation under the supervision of their advisers and must prepare and defend a thesis reporting the results of this research. It is highly recommended that students identify mentors for dissertation research as soon as possible within the first semester to ensure timely progress in their research.

When the thesis has been completed, copies are submitted to the members of the student's graduate advisory committee. The student's GAC decides upon the acceptability of the candidate's thesis. If the committee unanimously accepts the thesis for defense, the candidate appears before them for a final oral examination.

M.S. students are required to present a departmental seminar prior to the final oral thesis defense as a requirement for completion of the thesis.

**Curriculum requirements**

**Required courses**

Substitutions may be approved by the graduate program director.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IBMS 600</td>
<td>Laboratory Safety</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHTX 630</td>
<td>Basic Concepts in Pharmacology for Graduate Students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHTX 636</td>
<td>Principles of Pharmacology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHTX 639</td>
<td>Principles of Pharmacology Journal Club</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHTX 690</td>
<td>Pharmacology Research Seminar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Hours</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M.S. students are required to present a departmental seminar prior to the final oral thesis defense as a requirement for completion of the thesis.

**Advanced elective**

Select one advanced elective course in their specialty areas in addition to completing the research-based dissertation (See list below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHTX 697</td>
<td>Directed Research in Pharmacology (variable credit course taken for a minimum of 16 credits)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Hours</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total graduate credit hours required (minimum) 30**

**Recommended advanced electives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANAT 610</td>
<td>Systems Neuroscience</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOC 503</td>
<td>Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOC 504</td>
<td>Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOC 530</td>
<td>Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology Module 1: Protein Structure and Function</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOC 531</td>
<td>Biochemistry, Cell and Molecular Biology Module 2: Basic Metabolism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Typical plan of study

Many students often end up taking more than the minimum number of hours required for a degree program. The total number of hours may vary depending upon the program, nature of research being conducted by a study, or in the enrollment or funding status of the student. Students should refer to their program websites and talk with their graduate program directors or advisers for information about typical plans of study and registration requirements.

#### Graduate program director
Hamid I. Akbarali, Ph.D.
Professor and vice chair, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology
hamid.akbarali@vcuhealth.org
(804) 828-7918

#### Additional contact
Sheryol W. Cox
Coordinator, graduate programs in pharmacology and toxicology
sheryol.cox@vcuhealth.org
(804) 828-8400

**Program website:** pharmentox.vcu.edu (https://pharmentox.vcu.edu)